From Consumer reports – consumerunions.org

CU follows this procedure to test and rate products:

**Selection.** A selection committee chooses the kinds of products to test. It takes into account reader requests, reader surveys, reader interest in past reports, and a variety of other information/concerns. Next, a marketing study determines what brand/models should be tested. CU generally looks for brand/models (both national and regional) likely to be available to the most readers.

**Samples.** To make sure that the products tested are just like those consumers will find in the open market, CU sends shoppers with cash to buy the products to test at retail from stores across the country. It does not accept samples from manufacturers nor order directly from them. Because the quality of a product can vary from sample to sample due to its age, the plant where it was made, how it was stored, and other factors, CU often buys several samples of each brand/model in different parts of the country.

**Test design.** For some products, industry or government agencies have developed standardized tests that CU follows. Sometimes CU modifies the tests to yield more useful consumer information. But very often, CU develops its own testing procedures, and even builds the testing equipment needed. For example, to test mattress durability, engineers built a "mattress basher" that pounds mattresses with "fannies" made of glued-together bowling balls.

\*\*Most of CU's product tests are conducted in modern, well-equipped laboratories at its National Testing and Research Center in Yonkers, New York. Auto testing is carried out at CU's test track in southeastern Connecticut.

A product may undergo only a few or a dozen or more test sequences. These may include:

* Laboratory tests, during which each sample is subjected to exactly the same procedures and measurements;
* Controlled-use tests, in which a group of users try out the product according to CU directives;
* Evaluations by panels of experts.

To eliminate bias, wherever practical, test managers remove original packaging and identifying labels and replace them with standard containers and code numbers before user-panel testing begins.

**Rating.** CU rates each product according to a number of criteria. CU takes into account industry and government standards. But to receive a high rating from CU, a product must be "user-friendly."

Typically, the results of CU's tests are presented in Consumer Reports in an explanatory report followed by a "Ratings & Recommendations" section that includes ratings chart(s). Outstanding products are "check-rated" to show their high quality. In addition, models that feature both high quality and a modest price may be labeled "best buys." Ratings reports also supply detailed information about a model (size, standard features, extra features, and so on) with judgments about how separate features measure up.

**Caveats.** The ratings of one brand/model doesn't mean that a different model of the same brand would be ranked the same. And since the different samples of the same brand/model in stores across the country may vary, there's no guarantee that the sample a consumer buys in the store will match the quality of the samples tested.

**Analyze CU's recommendations for sunscreen:**

* What strategies and recommendations about choosing this product, if any, did CU make? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
* What was found to be the worst? The best?
* Describe how they tested the sunscreen – does it seem like a fair test?
* What was the bottom line- what was recommended the most?